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ABSTRACT

The effects of the significant changes in English education that have followed the 1988 Education Reform Act are explored in this study that considers the impact of the Reform Act on elementary schools and the changes in primary (elementary) schooling as an illustration of wider social developments. The work of B. Bernstein provides a framework for the exploration. The Primary Assessment, Curriculum, and Experience (PACE) Project was established in 1989 to monitor the effects of the Reform Act. Six schools were drawn from each of eight local education agencies (LEAs) across England, representing different socioeconomic circumstances, geographic regions, and other differences. These schools provided a sample of 48 headteachers. Interviews with 3 teachers from each school resulted in a teacher sample of 144 per round of the study. In each LEA one school was selected for more detailed study. The implementation of the national curriculum and associated assessment was of particular interest. Findings from the PACE study suggest that the attitudes and learning behavior of the children became much more performance oriented, rather than learning oriented, as they experienced the tightening of the curriculum and the impact of external and overt assessment. Teachers appeared to have increasing feelings that priorities were being imposed on them from above, with a loss of fulfillment and autonomy. Some teachers expressed fragmented identities, and many older and experienced teachers found it difficult to reconcile their beliefs with the new technocracy. A lack of confidence in their ability to cover the entire National Curriculum subjects was experienced by some. These changes are viewed in the wider context of social policy and change. (Contains 1 table, 6 figures, and 16 references.) (SLD)

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Categories, Standards and Instrumentalism: Theorising the Changing Discourse of Assessment Policy in English Primary Education

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Introduction

Primary education in England will never be the same again. The decade of unremitting change which has followed the most significant piece of educational legislation in half a century has ensured that this is so. As the tidal wave of new policy initiatives begins to ebb, it reveals a shore-line in which many of the principal features have been rearranged - the role of the headteacher and the way schools are managed; teachers' priorities and ways of working together; teaching methods and curriculum content. Perhaps to the casual observer, classroom practices and the activities of teachers and pupils may appear little changed. The constants of classrooms everywhere - talk, activity, display, busyness - a single teacher occupied with a large group of children - these are the defining characteristics of formal education today across the globe. Though it is possible that these too will begin to evolve as the technological developments of the information society become translated into institutional practice for the present schools and teachers, pupils and lessons are constants which we both recognise and understand, a familiar feature of our contemporary culture. All the more difficult, then, to appreciate the subtle yet profound redefining of the educational project that the last ten years has produced in English primary schools; the changes in relationships between headteacher and staff; between the teachers themselves and between teachers and their pupils; and the product of these changes - different attitudes, different goals, different concerns, different skills. An education system in which teachers' priorities in practice reflect a hard-won and often still uneasy, compromise between new obligations and an enduring vision that has its roots in a different era.

The Primary Assessment, Curriculum and Experience (PACE) project was established in 1989 to monitor the impact of the momentous changes then being put in place following the passing of the 1988 Education Reform Act. Funded in three stages 1989-1992; 1992-1994 and 1994-1997, the PACE project was uniquely placed to document the unfolding story of change in primary schools and, in particular, of the impact of the new National Curriculum and National Assessment requirements on headteachers, teachers and pupils in English primary schools.

More specifically, the three main project objectives were:

> *To monitor changes in teacher practices and pupil experiences in terms of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.*
>
> *To investigate the consequences of national policies and mediating effects which are associated with teacher perspectives, cultures and behaviour and, in particular, their perceptions of professional responsibility.*
>
> *To investigate the consequences of national policies and mediating effects which are associated with pupil perspectives, cultures and classroom behaviours.*

Whilst our first priority has been to describe and analyse the impact of the Reform Act on primary schools, we also aimed to consider the changes in primary schooling as an illustration of wider social developments. In particular, we have increasingly seen the changing focus of education policy as a reflection of post-modern society, with new priorities and new forms of contestation, regulation and discourse.

The research design (Figure 1) reflects our primary concern with how policy has impacted on classroom practice. In considering basic data-gathering necessities, we applied Bernstein's conceptualisation of 'three message systems', *curriculum, pedagogy and assessment*. He argues that these message systems convey the existing 'education codes' of their particular society (Bernstein 1975, 1990, 1996).

The national policy context

↓

Change and experience in the school context

↓

Change and experience in the classroom context

	Teachers	Pupils
Curriculum		
Pedagogy		
Assessment		

Figure 1 *Research design: data to be gathered*

A sample of schools was drawn from eight LEAs across England and broadly represented different socio-economic circumstances, regions, etc. Six schools (judged by advisers to be representative of each LEA) were selected within them. These schools provided a sample of 48 headteachers and, in successive rounds of data gathering, we interviewed or collected questionnaires from three teachers in each school - a teacher sample of 144 per round.

Within each LEA we selected one school for more detailed study (in one LEA two schools were selected). In our first year of study (1989), a Year 1 class was chosen (second year of schooling age 5/6 years) and from within this class six pupils were drawn

at random to provide a longitudinal focus in successive rounds of 'classroom studies'. The children were studied from Year 1 to Year 6, with any necessary replacements being again drawn at random from class-lists. Classroom studies comprised annual periods of fieldwork concentrated within one week and mostly in the Summer Term. They combined systematic observation and interviews of both the teacher and the target pupils, and this was supplemented by fieldnotes, the collection of documents and some audio-taping of interaction.

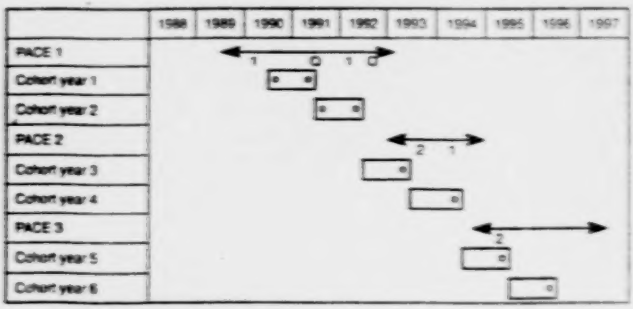


Figure 2 *Phases of data gathering in the PACE project*

Our study has a strong empirical flavour, and we have a responsibility to fully report the patterns of opinion, behaviour and practice which we have recorded. However, as we shall demonstrate, we have also attempted to theorise these findings and set them in the wider context of social change

In this respect, Bernstein's work has been of enormous significance for our study. As he has argued:

> *The selective organisation, transmission and evaluation of knowledge is intimately bound up with patterns of authority and control.*

and that:

The battle over curricula is also a conflict between different conceptions of social order and is therefore fundamentally moral.
(Bernstein 1975, p.81)

Our primary goal then, is to go beyond mere description in order to analyse and explain recent developments in these more general terms; to understand and to assess the significance of the responses to policy that our data documents. For our fundamental aspiration is to generate insights that can help to provide the basis for more generalised explanations of the significance of contemporary educational policy developments, particularly those concerning assessment.

The first part of what follows presents a brief overview of some of the key elements of the recent reforms and the particular concatenation of historical situation and political circumstances which gave rise to them. In the light of a brief summary of the PACE findings, the second half of the paper offers a more theoretical analysis of the nature and significance of recent policy development in general and of assessment in particular. Arising out of this analysis, the paper identifies key conceptual issues concerning teaching itself.

The context for change

Until the current National Curriculum was introduced in England following the legislation of 1988, the only formal control of the content of education concerned the requirement to teach religious education which was specified in the 1944 Education Act. Historically, England has been almost unique in not having a National Curriculum. Instead it has traditionally relied on various kinds of assessment, particularly public examinations to control the system. As in other countries the existence of so called 'high stakes' public examinations of 11+, 16+ and 18+ provided a powerful focus for schools which were otherwise free to make their own decisions about content. However, there was a recognised problem in providing coherence and continuity in the curriculum, with the result that children were sometimes exposed to the same curriculum content on several occasions. Thus one of the main stimuli for the introduction of a national curriculum was the desire to provide progression within a broad, balanced and coherent curriculum for the years between five and 16, years 1-10.

This concern had developed through the 1970s and 1980s from a sustained critique and sequence of moral panics concerning 'progressive' educational practices - which had been officially recommended by the Plowden Report (CACE) of 1967. Despite research evidence of the continuing preponderance of conventional ways of working, progressism was believed to dominate classroom practice in primary schools. There was considerable media attention over the period, including the occasional exposé, such as that in William Tyndale Primary School which caused a national scandal. Significant politicians in both the Labour and Conservative parties became convinced that primary school education was too child-centred and unstructured. It was seen as being dominated by the professional ideologies of the teaching profession and as failing to deliver sufficiently high standards

in basic skills. Although it was a Labour Prime Minister, Jim Callaghan, who in 1976 initiated a 'great debate' on how to reform education, it was the Conservative administrations of Margaret Thatcher and John Major who moved forward with fundamental, system-wide legislation.

Other, more structural factors, were also significant in prompting such change. The 1980s had seen a growth in international economic competition. This, together with growing financial pressures and an increased demand for state institutions to be accountable, underpinned a desire to curb the professional autonomy of teachers and to replace it with a much greater measure of a central control. A key ingredient in providing for such control is clearly the generation of comprehensive information about standards, about finance and about many different aspects of educational provision, hence the simultaneous and significant development of a variety of forms of monitoring during recent years.

In was in the 1980s too that a series of international surveys began to reveal how standards in England compared to those in other countries. The recently published (1997)Third International Mathematics Survey (TIMMS) provides a recent illustration of this kind of concern, showing as it did that English pupils apparently compare well with their peers in other countries on science achievement, but they are well down when it comes to mathematics. How far it is appropriate to trust such statistics is perhaps less important than recognising the effect of such high profile studies on policy-makers who are keen to be seen to be responding to public concern about standards.

In addition to these general concerns, there were also a number of more specific developments. One of these was the consequence of the almost total abandonment of 11+ testing with the advent of comprehensive schools during the 1970s. This development left primary schools in particular free of almost any kind of formal curriculum or assessment control. It also meant that there was very little information about the standards being achieved in primary schools and in the lower years of secondary schools. Although the Assessment of Performance Unit had been set up in the 1970s to monitor national performance in particular subject areas, this was a spasmodic exercise and was not sufficient to reassure public disquiet about the quality of primary education. Together these factors comprised a potent cocktail of unrest which was to lead to radical change.

The 1988 Education Act

The expressed aim of an educational policy initiative almost unprecedented in its ambition and scope was, quite simply, to raise standards. This was to be achieved by raising expectations about pupil achievement and the imposition of a broad and balanced National Curriculum for all pupils to provide for continuity and coherence in their learning experience. A key element in the introduction of the National Curriculum was provision for a National Assessment system. This National Assessment system was designed not only to *measure* the performance of pupils at the end of four key stages (years 1-2, 3-6, 7-10 and 11-12), but also to make it possible for market forces to operate by providing the currency of the competition between schools to attract pupils that had also been built into the 1988 Act.

The design of the National Assessment system drawn up by the Government's Task Group on Assessment and Testing envisaged an elaborate criterion-referenced structure of attainment targets, with pupils' achievement being recorded and reported at the end of key stage by means of a combination of teacher assessment, and their results from standard assessment tasks - externally provided assessment instruments. External assessment at the end of Key Stage 4 was to be in the form of the newly introduced GCSE examination. Significantly, such a comprehensive national assessment system could and subsequently did, provide attainment data with which to compare not only individual students, but also the results of their schools, of Local Education Authorities and indeed of the nation as a whole in comparative league tables.

Although this *evaluative* purpose of National Assessment was not envisaged as being its only or even its prime rationale, this has nevertheless arguably proved to be the case. The original aim was that National Assessment should also provide formative and diagnostic information to guide teachers in the classroom as well as summative information for students, teachers and parents about the level of attainment of a given child at a given stage. However, the emphasis on using the resultant assessment information externally is reflected in the fact that the policy reforms following the 1988 Act made provision both for new reporting requirements to parents and for the formal publication of league tables of school results.

Change on the scale described is likely to cause turbulence in any education system, and the English reforms were no exception. The PACE study was not alone in documenting the anger and despair of teachers in the early years of this decade as they struggled to implement both the National Curriculum and National Assessment. Both were too demanding in terms of teachers' time and were perceived to be over-prescriptive. The current National Curriculum reflects the review conducted by Sir Ron Dearing and introduced in September 1995, which slimmed down the content of the National Curriculum and simplified the elaborate structure of criterion- referenced attainment benchmarks into a more simple system of level descriptors which would provide the basis for assessment and reporting achievement. National tests would henceforth only be imposed in the core subjects of English, Maths and Science and for Key Stages 2 and 3, external markers were to be provided to lighten the load on classroom teachers. Furthermore, Teacher Assessment in both the 'core' and 'foundation' subjects was to have formally equal standing with the external test.

However, it was arguably the National Assessment requirements, rather than the introduction of a National Curriculum per se, which caused major controversy in the education system, particularly in primary schools. The first PACE book 'Changing English Primary Schools' (Pollard et al 1994) reported the project's findings concerning teachers' experiences with, and attitudes to, both the national curriculum and the assessment system during the early years of this decade. It made clear that teachers found the workload of implementing the new assessment requirements both an unacceptable burden in terms of the time required and equally unacceptable in terms of the prominence given to the explicit labelling and categorising of pupils in terms of their level of achievement. Given that primary schools had had little or no tradition of formal assessment since the demise of the 11+ selection examination in most parts of the

country, many teachers were ideologically opposed to conducting tests which they felt were neither meaningful or helpful. They also lacked professional experience in conducting such formal assessments and thus were faced with the need to develop new skills in this respect.

In 1993 many teachers refused to do the national tests on a formal basis. This revolt was initiated by English teachers at Key Stage 3 who were objecting to the content of the tests and their inevitable washback effect on curriculum priorities. However, the fact that the revolt rapidly spread into primary schools as well provides a good illustration of the extent of the antipathy towards national assessment that existed among primary teachers at that time. As 'Changing English Primary Schools' makes clear, the causes of this antipathy were at a number of levels.

At the most obvious level were issues of workload and time and teachers' objections to a procedure that would take many days of effort for both teachers and pupils but would not, in their view, contribute to the facilitation of pupils' learning. Beneath this though, were more fundamental concerns about the anticipated effect of such tests on the priorities and practices of English primary schooling. It was already clear that the well-established English tradition of controlling schools by means of external assessment requirements was being redeployed in a new and powerful way to impose a particular set of curriculum priorities on schools.

Throughout the years since 1988 and the various stages of implementing a national assessment system, there has been a clear tension between validity and reliability. The initial TGAT design had called for the creation of 'Standard Assessment Tasks' which were as much like normal primary classroom activities as possible. However, the steadily growing emphasis year by year on the use of National Assessment results as an external indicator of school standards meant that the reliability of the information became increasingly important. In the context of 'league tables' of test results at school and LEA level being published in the national media, assessment procedures had to be rigorously controlled in order to ensure fairness in any comparison between different school's achievements. Given significant worries about the reliability of the more valid tasks of the early years of National Assessment, the consequence was a steady trend towards the use of formal, externally-controlled paper and pencil tests at all levels.

Although externally set and marked tests provide for a greater level of comparability between classrooms, between schools and between LEAs, they inevitably suffer from the limitations of the technology used and cannot test the full range of curriculum goals. Furthermore, despite the fact that the teacher assessments are designed to complement the external tests, there is nevertheless clear evidence that the growing importance of external tests at the end of primary school and half way through secondary school is constraining the curriculum to focus on both the content and the procedures found in the tests.

Findings from the PACE study of the implementation of national curriculum and assessment suggests that,

> *The attitudes and learning behaviour exhibited by the children as they experienced an increased tightening of curriculum control*

and of the impact of external and overt assessment became more strongly evident at the end of key stage 2. They are "performance orientated" rather than "learning orientated". The children in the study were very aware of the importance of good marks, getting things right. In a climate of explicit and formal assessment, however, many of them avoided challenge and had a low tolerance of ambiguity (Pollard and Triggs forthcoming).

The increasing emphasis on practising for the tests is well evidenced in Table 1:

Table 1 *Children's awareness and understanding of "learning" related to teacher intentions (percentages)*

	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Information	25	7	33	35	36	20
Practice	0	13	4	15	17	36
Progression	50	27	33	27	17	19
Skill	25	53	30	23	30	25
Number of pupils	10	16	26	27	30	32

Source: PACE 1, 2 and 3 child interview data.
Sample: 141 children in Years 1 - 6.
Date: Autumn 1990 and 1991, Summer 1993 and 1994, Spring 1995 and 1996.

Table 1 shows children's awareness and understanding of "learning" as related to teacher intentions. To practice particular skills and techniques has become a significant focus in Year 6 compared to notions of learning for the acquisition of either information or skills Providing opportunities for practice was perceived clearly as a learning intention, often in relation to writing and sums. In Year 6 "Practice" was the perceived intention most frequently mentioned by the children - for reasons which they articulated explicitly.

To get us ready for SATs.
To get us ready for the sort of questions in SATs - to prepare us.
To revise for SATs.
Practising for SATs - could be in the test.
Training for the tests in the summer.
To practice letter writing.
To practice for SATs.
To get used to joining up letters for English - cos we'll lose marks.

In the forthcoming volume 'Policy, Practice and Pupil Experience: Changing English Primary Education' which reports the PACE project's findings concerning the experiences of pupils who have been in primary school since the National Curriculum and Assessment was introduced, we present evidence to suggest that children's attitudes and learning behaviour is significantly affected by the inevitable tightening of curriculum

control that has taken place in response to the pressures of external and overt assessment. (Pollard and Triggs, forthcoming). We describe how children are becoming "performance orientated" rather than "learning orientated" and the profound implications of this in influencing what is learned, when, for what purpose and in what way.

Back to Basics?

Since the Labour government came to power in May 1997 the performance orientated trend has continued. This has been expressed most explicitly in the White Paper 'Excellence in Schools' (DFEE 1997) which sets out Labour's new drive to raise educational standards, whilst also conveying its 'zero tolerance of failure'. Testing of pupils, league tables of school performance and school inspections are thus to continue and, in some respects, have been extended. In parallel with these developments has been an ever increasing emphasis on the basics of literacy and numeracy coupled with pressure from influential policy makers for a return to more "traditional" teaching methods, particularly whole class teaching (Woodhead 1998). New targets have been established for national levels of pupil attainment and, from September 1998, each individual school will be required to set its own targets for the improvement of its pupils in nationally administered standard assessment tests. Local Education Authorities are also to be subject to requirements for target setting and inspection. Overall then, the extent of the control and monitoring of performance by central government and its agencies continues to increase.

In primary education, pupil performance in mathematics and English has become an even more significant indicator, and this emphasis has been reinforced by a reprioritisation of the National Curriculum. Thus, in January 1988, the Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett, announced that some of the requirements of the primary National Curriculum were being suspended for the next two years prior to the completion of a comprehensive review. Replacing the breadth of the ten subject curriculum, only English, mathematics, science, information technology and religious education remain as required subjects. Schools are expected to continue teaching history, geography, design and technology, art, music and physical education - but to use their discretion over the time allocated and coverage attempted. The purpose of this reduction of National Curriculum requirements has been expressed in terms of the Government's determination to ensure that all children would leave primary school equipped with the necessary competence in the basics of literacy and numeracy.

Taken in the context of the various policy initiatives of the last ten years or so, the reduction of National Curriculum specification may be seen as an extremely significant development which heralds the end of a particular policy chapter. On the one hand it will return to teachers some of the flexibility that they enjoyed before the National Curriculum was introduced - to decide, for instance, how to respond to any particular curricular needs of the children in their school. On the other it is likely to narrow the focus even more on 'the basics' of literacy and numeracy rather than, as in recent years, ensuring that all pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum.

This new policy development well illustrates the themes which have informed it throughout, the themes which have characterised developments in curriculum and

assessment in England during the last decade. It is these themes - the issue of central control versus institutional and teacher autonomy; the issue of depth versus breadth in curriculum provision; the concern over standards and the desire to identify, measure and achieve clear targets in terms of pupils learning outcomes; the belief in the power of market forces fuelled by 'league tables'- which coalesce to form the basis for the more theoretical analysis that follows.

Categories, Standards and Instrumentalism

Whilst our first priority has been to describe and analyse the impact of the Reform Act on primary schools, we also aimed to consider the changes in primary schooling as an illustration of wider social developments. In particular, we have seen the changing focus of education policy as a reflection of post-modern society, with new priorities and new forms of contestation, regulation and discourse. In *describing* the developments in primary education that have taken place we are also seeking to *understand* them as part of wider social developments at the end of the twentieth century. Our particular concern is to explore the significance of the gradual establishment of the new hegemony of 'performance' which the PACE project has documented; and to use this analysis of the nature of contemporary English educational discourse as a case-study illustration of more general underlying contemporary trends.

In 1994 we described the PACE project as 'one of the many stepping stones in the quest to understand the nature of the educational enterprise and hence, how to provide for it most effectively (Pollard et al, p4) in a changing context. Thus our research has been designed to help understand the origin and significance both of the policy initiatives imposed by Government and those which are the product of the attempts by teachers and headteachers to reconcile these requirements with their professional values and understandings. Why were these policy initiatives set in motion in the England of the late 1980's and what, ultimately, is likely to be their significance for the nature and quality of pupils' learning?

From the outset, the work of Basil Bernstein has proved particularly apposite as a foundation framework for these theoretical interpretations. The capacity of Bernstein's conceptualisation to embrace curriculum, pedagogy and assessment; and its concern with power, knowledge and consciousness as key variables, made it possible to use it to integrate the diverse perspectives of the PACE project into three core themes, which we identified as *values, understanding and power*.

Central to the early analyses of the PACE project was the argument that schools, as well as teachers and pupils, are 'embedded in a dynamic network of personal identity, values and understandings that are constantly developing in the light of internal and external interaction, pressure and constraint' Pollard et al 1995(p156). Because of this, policy directives are translated into classroom practice through a series of 'mediations'. Such 'mediations', we argued, should not be conceptualised in engineering terms as a series of articulated levers that relay a load through the structure. Rather they are the creative reinterpretation by the actors involved at each successive stage of the process of delivering education.

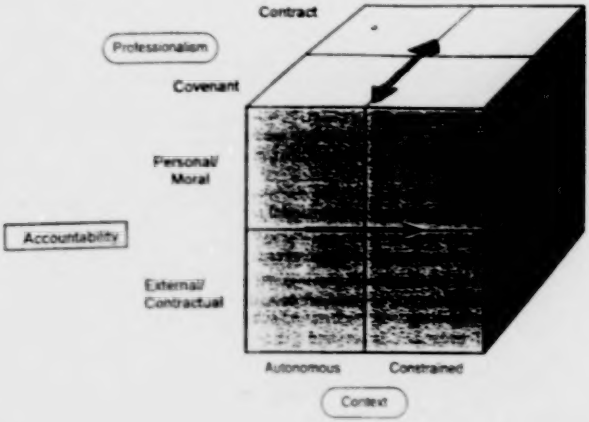
In these terms too, Bernstein's analysis of the pedagogic code and its power to define, and hence control, which is embodied in the discourse of primary, secondary and subsequent reconceptualisations of the original message, provides a powerful theoretical model with which to examine the significance of the changes documented in the PACE data.

Now, at the end of PACE 3 and of the longitudinal study as a whole, we are working towards both the production of a comprehensive descriptive picture of how things have changed in primary schools since 1989 and the creation of a more comprehensive theoretical framework which will bring the diverse insights of the project together. We aim to draw some general conclusions concerning the significance of the changes that have taken place and perhaps to identify some guidelines for the future.

The findings from the PACE study suggest that amongst teachers in the upper years of primary school there were increasing feelings of priorities being imposed upon the teacher from outside and a loss of fulfilment and autonomy. External accountability had increased and although personal and moral responsibility was still seen as important, there was some evidence of a shift in climate from a covenant based on trust to a contract based on the delivery of education to meet national economic goals rather than as a form of personal development. Some teachers expressed fragmented identities, torn between a discourse which emphasised technical and managerial skills and values which continued to emphasise the importance of an emotional and affective dimension to teaching. The evidence suggested that older more experienced teachers found it more difficult to reconcile their beliefs with the new technocracy. A new professionalism seemed to be emerging among newer teachers who were more likely to find satisfaction within a more constrained and instrumental role without losing their commitment to the affective side of teaching. The issue of confidence was important to all teachers and lack of confidence to cover all the National Curriculum subjects may have contributed to the loss of fulfilment and enjoyment experienced by some teachers.

We have used the well-established Bernsteinian concepts of classification and framing to develop various cubic representations, the facets of which portray the different, but interrelated trends which have taken place in primary schools over the period.

The findings of the PACE research concerning the experiences of primary teachers are summarised in **Figure 3**.



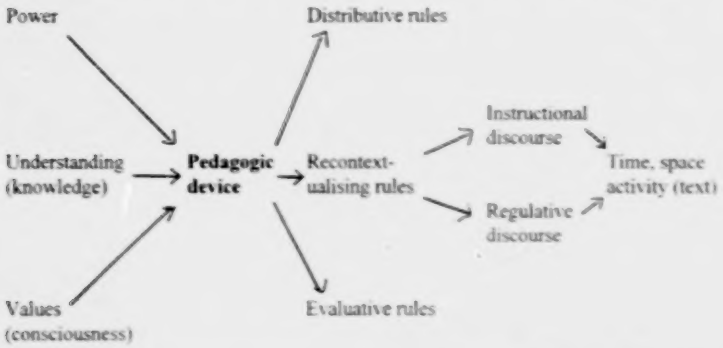
What then is the significance of these changes for pupils, who are themselves also becoming increasingly performance-orientated and instrumental in their orientation, and are all too aware of the hurdles that lie before them and the skills they must acquire if they are to jump them? We believe that, as different groups within the education system seek to accommodate the new requirements on them through a variety of mediations, they are gradually changing the discourse through which the ideology and practice of primary education is expressed.

We see this as the operation of Bernstein's 'pedagogic device', which he describes as:

> 'the symbolic ruler for consciousness - the fundamental system for both creating and controlling the unthinkable' (1996, p50)

As Figure 3 shows, it is possible to use this concept of the 'pedagogic device' to analyse the significance of the changes which have taken place in policy, in pedagogy and curriculum and in evaluation which Bernstein expresses as the distributive, the recontextualising and evaluative rules respectively. In short, 'who may transmit what, to whom and under what conditions' (p183).

Figure 4 *A PACE model of the pedagogic device* (after Bernstein, 1996, p52)



Bernstein locates the 'pedagogic discourse' of primary education which is now being progressively eroded, within a number of broad social science traditions of the 1960s. These had a common emphasis on 'competencies' and are characterised by a 'universal democracy of acquisition'. He cites, for example, the psychology of Piaget, the linguistics of Chomsky and the sociology of Garfinkel as instances of social scientific conceptualisations which in turn came to underpin the creation of educational approaches based on 'competencies'. These identified the subject as active and creative in the construction of a valid world of meaning and practice; and an educational approach which 'celebrated what we are rather than what we have become' and in which the role of formal instruction is replaced by accomplishments which are intrinsically creative and tacitly acquired.

Radical as these educational ideas may seem, Bernstein argued that they found 'official' expression in the 1969 Report of the Plowden Committee, *'Children and their Primary Schools'* and the next twenty years of primary school practice which the report's ideas profoundly shaped. He contrasts the 'competence' based pedagogic model with one based on 'performance' which emphasises a specific output from the acquirer, a particular text that the learner is required to construct and the acquisition of the specialised skills necessary to the creation of the required output. Through the operation of explicit assessment procedures, learners will be made aware of the learning outcomes that will be valued. Their performance will in turn be a means of locating them in terms of a hierarchical judgement.

The characteristics of Bernstein's 'performance' pedagogic model are readily recognisable in the developments currently taking place in primary schools as documented by the PACE project. As Figures 5 and 6 illustrate, the increasingly tight classification of the curriculum into clearly delineated subjects; the growing strength of the framing of both teachers' and pupils' work so that they have less and less autonomy and choice; and the designation of times and spaces for particular purposes, are all clear

indicators. Perhaps most powerful of all however, is the changing assessment discourse and the way in which the language of levels and achievement for pupils, institutional evaluation, standards and 'value-added' for schools, reflect a profound change in both Bernstein's regulative discourse which creates social order, social relations and social identity and the instructional discourse which is associated with the inculcation of particular knowledge and skills.

The table below, displays some of these issues in contrastive ways for analytic purposes, though of course the situation is more complex than this device allows. This form of modelling derives from Bernstein (1996, p 58), though he is in no way responsible for our adaptation and extension.

Figure 5 *Some contrastive aspects of competence and performance models in relation to schools and teachers*

	A 'competence model' **LIBERAL PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION**	*A 'performance model'* **PERFORMANCE EDUCATION**
SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS	***'Invisible management' with relative professional autonomy***	***'Visible management' with relative professional regulation***
Organisational form	Professional, with flat management structure. Control through self-regulation, socialisation and internalisation of norms	Mechanistic, with hierarchical structure and bureaucracy. Standardisation for control and co-ordination
Management style	Collegiate, with emphasis on proficiency, dialogue and consensus. Informality in relationships	Managerial, with emphasis on efficiency and target setting for results. Greater formality in relationships
Teacher roles	Teachers as facilitators, with affective dimensions seen as intrinsic to the teaching role	Teachers as instructors and evaluators, with emphasis on cognitive and managerial skills
Teacher professionalism	Professional covenant based on trust, and commitment to education as a form of personal development. Confidence and sense of fulfilment and spontaneity in teaching	Professionalism is the fulfilment of a contract to deliver education, which is seen as a commodity for individuals and a national necessity for economic growth. Teacher confidence and fulfilment are less
Teacher accountability	Personal and 'moral' accountability	External and contractual accountability
Whole school co-ordination	Relative autonomy and informal teacher collaboration	Formal school planning with 'contrived' collegiality
Economic costs	Expensive, because of sophisticated teacher education and time-consuming school practices	Cheaper, because of more explicit teacher training and systematised school practices

Figure 6 *Some contrastive aspects of competence and performance models in relation to classrooms and pupils*

CLASSROOMS AND PUPILS	*'Invisible pedagogies', with weak classification and frame*	*'Visible pedagogies', with strong classification and frame*
Autonomy	Considerable	Limited
Space	Flexible boundaries and use	Explicit regulation
Time	Flexible emphasis on present experiences	Strong structuring, sequencing and pacing
Activity	Emphasis on the realisation of inherent learner capabilities through subject integrated and learner controlled activities, such as projects	Strong control over selection of knowledge and explicit promotion of specialised subjects and skills
Evaluation	Emphasis on immediate, present qualities using implicit and diffuse criteria	Emphasis on inadequacies of the product using explicit and specific performance criteria
Control	Relatively 'invisible', with control inhering in interpersonal communications and relationships	Explicit structuring and systems for classification and differentiation through instruction
Pupil products	Pupil products are taken to indicate a stage of cognitive, affective or social development. Teachers 'read' and interpret learner products using specialised professional judgement and knowledge	Pupil products are simply taken to indicate performance, as objectified by grades. Teachers instruct and assess using established procedures and criteria.
Pupil learning	Highlighting intrinsic motivation and encouraging mastery orientation Potential for 'deep learning', but tendency to produce routinisation and evasion	Highlighting performance orientation Tendency to produce instrumentalism and 'surface learning' or learned helplessness and withdrawal

The significance of these changes and findings may be examined in terms of two broad issues.

First, they suggest a deep tension between the rhetoric of the much vaunted ' learning society' and the reality of the 'performance' culture which is being promoted by current policy-making and by the accountability requirements which are being placed on schools. The educational ideology of the learning society is one in which learners are empowered to want and be able to manage their own learning in an individualistic manner, where

there will be more openness and opportunity, and fewer prescribed spaces and times for learning, or defined outcomes or prescribed bodies of knowledge. One manifestation of this is a new set of proposals from the Labour Government on lifelong learning, 'The Learning Age: A Renaissance for a New Britain' (DFEE 1998).

However, we believe that the call for resilient and flexible learners, whose intrinsic motivation and mastery orientation will provide the foundation of future national economic and social development, is in tension with the systemic, performance-oriented changes which are being strengthened within the schools system.

As Gray (1990) has argued:

> the *'rhetoric about 'driving up standards' can be read as an attempt to realign education to the commodity values that increasingly define worthwhile or legitimate knowledge in post-industrial societies' i.e. 'the task of education is not the dissemination of a general model of life, not to transform students' minds but to supply the system with the merchandise it needs in the form of information and skills.'* p10

This suggests that we have reached a stage in the development of assessment as a policy device in which its role is not just to hold schools (and other institutions) accountable for educational standards but rather, the redefining of the educational standards themselves in terms of economic commodity values. Elliott (1996) has further argued that the new emphasis on assessment as a policy device is not simply or even mainly about raising standards, but rather plays a central role in '*changing the rules which shape educational thought and practice. They are part of a language game which serves the interests of power and legitimates those interests in terms of the performativity criterion' p16.* Whilst here Elliott is explicitly referring to school effectiveness research, the argument may well be applied to the whole domain of assessment activities in which:

> *'The more successful such reviews are in manufacturing a consensus about the properties that characterised good schools, the more marginalised and silenced are the voices who would articulate, given the social space to do so, a different vision of quality in education, of the pedagogical conditions which make it possible and of the contribution of research to its realisation (Elliott, p16).*

To the extent that such voices are silenced, however, the likelihood of developing the type of educational institution that is needed to foster 'life-long learning for all is correspondingly reduced. On the one hand, increasingly pervasive 'categoric assessments' mean that a substantial and probably correspondingly increasing, number of learners are put off the business of learning at a relatively young age by the experience of failure. On the other, the institutions themselves are condemned to pursue and prioritise those learning goals which form the basis of the 'league tables' and other external quality assessments on which they will be judged.

Thus, as different groups within the education system seek to accommodate to the new requirements being placed on them through a variety of mediations based on their own values and understandings with regard to the goals of education and how they may best be achieved, they are gradually changing the discourse through which the ideology and practice of education at any particular level is expressed. Informing the development of a new discourse is the struggle for control of the 'pedagogic device, of the means for, in turn, 'controlling consciousness, identity and desire' (Bernstein, unpublished p2) 'the symbolic ruler for consciousness - the fundamental system for both creating and controlling the unthinkable (1996, p50) In short, if it is accepted, as Bernstein argues, that 'pedagogic modalities are crucial realisations of symbolic control', the changing emphases that we have documented in English primary education may be read as both a reflection and a reinforcement of the process of cultural production and reproduction' p1

This brings us to our second issue. It should by now be clear that the current obsession with assessment, particularly categoric assessment, is not, and cannot be, simply the application of a neutral technology. Tests are not 'valid irrespective of human expectation, ideas attitudes and wishes (Feyerabend 1987, p5). Rather it must be understood as a 'social technology' (Madaus,1994) rooted in contemporary power relations. The rapid growth of assessment activity in recent years would suggest growing tensions in the social fabric such that the *instrumental* legitimating ideology of economic progress and international competitiveness has become elevated into the expressive legitimating ideology itself - the fundamental *raison d'être* of life. In such circumstances, where the means to the end - economic performance - becomes the end itself, society begins to lack any more fundamental basis for social solidarity than mutual competitiveness (Broadfoot, 1996). One important consequence of this has been the recourse to 'performativity' measures. This in turn has had the result of silencing alternative voices concerning the goals of education and how these goals may best be achieved.

Thus, whilst lifelong learning and increased participation are broadly perceived as desirable in economic terms, their realisation in practice requires a fundamental change in the dominant 'performance' ideology and the associated 'categoric' assessment discourse - currently the most powerful source of power and legitimation for the status quo. Assessment devices are necessarily instruments of power. 'They are not, and cannot be, measures or indicators of some purely objective, independently-existing state of affairs' writes Hanson (1994) rather they 'act to transform, mould and even to create, what they supposedly measure' (p52).

The prevailing culture of 'categoric' assessment moulds individuals' views of themselves both as learners and as people more generally, it moulds and controls notions of success and failure and the reasons for it; and increasingly it forms the basis for the way in which institutions are both managed and judged. Above all it shapes our vision of education and its priorities in the late twentieth century. Just as 'categoric' assessment procedures and their informing concepts provided the framework to shape the evolving educational organisations of industrial society, so now these concepts need to be replaced by those appropriate to the needs of education in a post-modern society. The emphasis on assessment for selection, 'performativity' and control must now be replaced by an

emphasis on flexibility and empowerment for both individuals and institutions if 'life-long learning' is to become a reality.

As one of us argued in a recent paper for the National Curriculum agency, QCA (Pollard 1997), the aims and structure of the National Curriculum for primary schools should be reconceptualised to enable teachers to achieve a new balance between basic skills, subject knowledge, learning dispositions and personal, social and moral development. Our analysis of the broad trends of change in primary education suggests that, as the performance orientation continues to dominate, teachers may find it increasingly difficult to also produce pupils with positive dispositions to learning. A narrow performance orientation, whilst satisfying short-term performance indicators, may thus have the unintended consequence of actually undermining pupils' longer-term dispositions to learn through life.

Second, the trends which we have identified suggest the likelihood of growing tensions in the social fabric as the instrumental legitimating ideology of economic progress and international competitiveness becomes elevated into an expressive legitimating ideology itself. Wheresociety lacks any more fundamental basis for social solidarity than mutual competitiveness. It is likely to lead to some of the tensions that are already reflected in contemporary debates about discipline in schools, crime and moral decline, as well as in the PACE evidence that points to teachers' increasing concern about the performance and behaviour of children from disadvantaged social groups.

The PACE study has focused on a particular sector of English society, primary education, which is located within the broader sweep of history and social, cultural, economic and political change as we engage with new forms of modernity and post-modernity. In this paper we have sought to establish the importance of seeking to understand the more profound significance of the rationale informing contemporary assessment policy and to offer an analysis based on Bernstein's theories of social and cultural reproduction. Whilst documenting the significance of these changes in their own terms, the final book (Broadfoot and Pollard, forthcoming) from the project will extend this analysis of the wider context of which current policy developments are a part and the consequences to which they may lead.

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